

The Four Horseshoes Sherfield on Loddon – a short history

by Jan Holden

The content of this article is built on information within census records along with Kelly's directory, local newspaper articles, records held within Basingstoke and Deane borough along with the knowledge and memories held by the residents of our village, past and present.

It is understood that the oldest part of the Four Horseshoes dates from 15/16th century, that being the main bar area on the right as you face the pub. There is evidence that the original beams in the main bar (not all of them are original) have been reused, a common practice in past times when rebuilding a dwelling. Also you can see the original 'wattle and daub', used to make walls before bricks were common place, upstairs in the loft area.

The pub started its life as an ale or beer house, that is not fully licensed and only allowed to sell beer and it stayed this way until the early 20th century. From 1841 it appears that there was a blacksmiths attached to pub as it is noted that during the latter half of the 19thC that the owner or lodger were of that profession. In 1871 it is noted that a William George Charlton was 'blacksmith & beer seller although the exact residence is not noted It could be assumed that this is how the pub got its name 'The Four Horseshoes'? The blacksmith was housed in the garden according to an 1872 map. One can imagine those coming to have their horse shod sitting in the ale house supping an ale while they waited!



During the middle of the 19thC records state the landlady as an Elizabeth Burgess, her lodger was a George Thackham who was then noted as lead house holder in 1861 and 1871 census. His profession was noted as blacksmith hence the connection and the first time the place was called The Horseshoes according to the records.

In **1881** and 1885 was the first time it was noted as 'The Four Horseshoes' and a Mr. Henry Smith, beer retailer, was in charge. There were 10 people housed in the building at this time, Mr & Mrs Smith plus their five children (aged 5 to 11) plus three lodgers, one of which was a blacksmith. It is puzzling how they all fitted into such a small space especially as the pub would

have looked much as it did in the 1908 photo below however it could be assumed that not all of the downstairs would have been used as a bar area?

James Robb (Beer house keeper), his wife and 10 year old son lived there in **1891**. In 1896 it is noted on an ordnance survey map that there was a well in the front that was covered by a driveway by 1911 also the stabling/garages were in place but not joined to the main house; this now the skittle alley/function room.

In **1901** the land lady was Mrs. Thirza Stratton and only licensed to sell beer, she ran the pub for several years until she gave up due to financial difficulties.



Figure 1: Mrs Thirza Stratton with her daughter Lucy – the letter sent with this photograph states 1908

There appears to be a strong family link between the Westbrook, Nicholson and Williams families who are linked to the pub for the first half of the 20th century. Charles Westbrook was the half-brother of Thomas Nicholson, who appears as the next licence of the pub. Their mother was Mary Smith, who married Thomas Sarsford Nicholson in 1848 and James Westbrook in 1871

According to the **1911** census Mr Charles and Louisa Westbrook were running the place and were followed by Thomas and Beatrice Nicolson, who came from Basingstoke. Their son William Nicolson, was killed in the Great War. His name appears on the war memorial within the village; he enlisted in 1915 and was only 20 when he died in the Middle East. Thomas Nicolson came from Bramley and took over somewhere between mid 1911 and 1914.



Figure 2: Circa 1910 showing the 'canopy' at the front plus the stabling on the right-hand side. The canopy was still there in the 1950's

By **1914** the pub was noted to be a 'Simmonds' pub, they were a family owned brewery based in Reading (their brewery was alongside the River Kennet where the Oracle is now) and were eventually taken over by Courage circa 1960, then Enterprise Inns.

At the start of **WW2** Mr. Ernest and Mrs Edith Williams, who was the son in law of the Nicolson's and also came from Basingstoke, are noted in the 1939 National Identity Register as the landlords, it is thought they took over the pub circa 1920, and they remained there for the 20s, 30s and into the 40s. Both his daughters both married local men, a Mr Onions and a Mr Brooks.

There is a lack of information for the following years until **1950's** when a Charlie Bartlett was in charge, he is known for walking around the village with his pet fox on a lead. The memory of one of residents is when he first came to the area just after WW2 is when he stayed in the village when demobbed. He remembers the back half of the public bar was the cellar and the toilets where outside in the garden!

Fred and Rene Richards were landlord/lady from **1964** to 1978. Back then there was just one front entrance in the middle of the building and no side doors, the Picture 1 was thought to date from this time and before the building was altered to how it is today; this would have been the Saloon Bar by the main entrance door today and the inside made to look like a more authentic 'old' pub; as we know it today. In 1978 the village staged a 'This is your Life' celebration to make the end of their running of the pub, Picture 2 show them behind the bar, note how different it is from today.



Figure 3: Inside the saloon bar



Figure 4]: Fred & Rene behind the bar

Dennis & Jill Cooke ran the place **1979** - 1981 and again from **1984** – 1996.

The pub was still under the umbrella of the Courage Brewery when Tony and Marion were there as managers in 1979 and it is thought that a Derek & Elizabeth Thomas ran the pub for a while at this time but little is can be found out about them?

[Shirley Chowney-Cooke](#)

When our parents, Jill and Dennis Cooke ran the Four Horseshoes pub we had lots of strange, unexpected things happen from bedclothes and curtains moving, shadows in the original kitchen even during the day and strange noises in the cubby hole upstairs, things that had moved from their position or went missing for a while. The one I remember most was the night mom went to bed before dad and whilst reading a book the bed moved and no one else was in the room and the pile of board games shot off the top of the wardrobe

When the kitchen got moved and the Vanner room was being decorated we found an old cellar entrance just below the step, the builder and dad said it gave them shivers when they moved the opening stone....

[Shirley Chowney-Cooke](#)

[Jan Holden](#) the vanner room was the pub/ home kitchen and had a private door up to the living accommodation and loft but we built an extension to house the current/ new larger catering kitchen and converted the barns to the skittle alley and changed the layout of the private garden and parking to make it available to customers

[Shirley Chowney-Cooke](#)

It was called The Vanner room after a type of horse that was used to pull carriages, sometimes called a gypsy cob and was a non smoking restaurant in the days when you could still smoke inside the pub

Shirley Chowney-Cooke also where was the original kitchen?

Jan Holden these were promotional cards mom & dad had made at the time of the building works being completed



Figure 5: Promotional literature



Figure 6: Promotional literature

Shirley Chowney-Cooke

The original telephone number for the pub was Turgis Green 296

Shirley Chowney-Cooke

Jan Holden it was the Vanner Room with a door next to the ladies leading into it and then another up to the private accommodation and a side door leading to our private garden area

In **1997** Connor Murray-Robertson & Norman Ayling appeared in a Basingstoke Gazette article focusing on the village; the article looks at how Norman came to be in the licensing trade and how the business partnership was improving footfall.



Figure 7: Norman Ayling & Connor Murray-Robertson

It is currently not known when Alan Wingrove (Big Al) took over the pub however he handed over the reins to Maralyn (Maz) Braybrook in April **2005**. At this time the pub was owned by El Publican Partnerships now Stonegate.



Figure 8: The pub circa 2010

Scott Miles and Julie Rossi were there for 2+ years from June **2013** when the present tenants Jan Holden and daughter, Lyndsey Ruby, took over in October **2015** and handed over the pub to Lily Mgweru in November **2020**.

The pub has been a long established part of the village and a centre of activity for the community and of course, with a building of such a great age there will always be a ghost or two, one of the current incumbents we called the 'Grey Lady'. Mischievous rather than malevolent; the feeling that someone is in the corridor by the toilets, glasses falling off shelves, equipment turning itself off, things being moved around with the spookiest event being when the bar bell rang by itself! Once some customers asked if we had a cat, we did not, as they had seen one walk through the pub.

The advent of the lock down during the coronavirus pandemic has been, to our knowledge, the only time the pub has been closed for business for such a long time and another part of its long history. I wonder what the Grey Lady made of that!

With grateful thanks to both Peter Lansley and Mark Adams for helping with the research into this article and of course the memories of the village in helping with this article. If you have any particular memories or more knowledge about The Four Horseshoes or any of the other public house in the village/locally, please contact Jan Holden. This version 2023.